3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

societies maintaining officially a conspiracy of silence, the stories were only standard replies by adults to children, and most adults admitted that children pursued these inquiries among themselves and found out what they wanted to know from each other.

Naming the child

After coming out of the hut and being presented to its male kin and to the elders of the village as 'the new stranger', the baby was given a name. The choice of a name was usually left to the baby's paternal grandfather. He sometimes gave it his name or his father's name, if a boy, or if a girl, his mother's name or his father's sister's name. There was no ceremony attached to naming. After the matter had been talked over by the men at the kraal gate, the grandfather came to the hut, and called the mother and child out and said, 'His name is so and so.' The personal name was seldom used in ordinary social intercourse, but in spite of this every child was given a personal name, and sometimes had added to it a descriptive name indicating that it had been born face downwards, or born a twin, or born too soon after the previous baby.

At this time of naming, the father, or more generally the paternal grandfather, prepared a 'carrying skin' for the mother to carry the baby in. It really belonged to the baby rather than to the mother, for it was used by the nurse girl to carry the baby, and she had the child in her charge most of the day. The skin was that of a goat or small calf from the herd owned by the house to which the baby's father belonged. The skin was cleaned and scraped and made soft by rubbing in fat, and handed over to the mother with some of the meat for broth, and the rest of the meat was eaten by the males of that house. The gift in time became a cloth and not a skin, as skins for wearing or household use went out of fashion. The cloth when presented however was still called a 'carrying skin' and a goat or a calf from the herd of the

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

854 house was still killed and eaten. The cloth came out of the [432] store of cloth bought when cattle were sold, and kept in the hut of the senior woman of the father's house.

Visit to the mother's home

593 574 If, as was always the case in earlier days, the mother of the new baby had come from a distant village, she did not see her own mother or her relatives, and they did not see the child until it was several weeks old, and considered by the senior women strong enough to undertake a journey. Then a visit involving much ceremony took place, for the wife's [606] mother-in-law headed the party. The stiff and formal relations between the two sets of 'in-laws' had been eased slightly through the series of feasts and exchanges which preceded and followed the marriage ceremony. Face-to-face [571] intercourse was, however, still very formal between the two families, and this first visit with the grandchild was in one sense an act of condescension on the part of the husband's family, since the child belonged to them. It was also a human and natural recognition of the eagerness of the young mother to see her own mother and display her child. Word was sent in advance by a messenger from the husband's village to announce the visit, so that the wife's family could make due preparation.

The main object of this visit was, in the Ngoni phrase, 'to show the child at its mother's home'. The young mother and [606] baby, with her mother-in-law in the place of honour, sat outside the big house of the girl's father's family. Her father [431] and his male relatives came to salute the child and to give it [603] presents of beads, and in modern times small gifts of money as well. If the girl's father owned many cattle, he killed a beast, and they feasted that night, and the visitors carried home meat with them as well as the presents to the child. It was all very formal and correct, except when the young mother escaped for a short time to the circle of her sisters and girlhood friends, and exchanged confidences with them.

After this formal visit had taken place, the young mother was free to visit her former home more often, and her relatives could come and see her and her baby in her husband's village.

Taking care of the baby

There were two special features of infant care among the Ngoni which were not found among the neighbouring peoples. One was the assignment of a nurse girl from outside the circle of relatives to care for a new infant. The nurse girl was chosen by the grandmother from among her dependent household staff, and was allotted to one particular baby. The girl, who was usually in her early teens and unmarried, was supervised by an older woman, also of the grandmother's household. This woman watched over the personal behaviour of several nurse girls, as well as seeing that they did their work properly as nurses.

The nurse girl took charge of the baby in the early morning and kept it with her all day until nightfall, bringing it back to the mother at more or less regular intervals for suckling. The mother played with the baby if she felt like it, and sent for the nurse girl to bring it to her if strangers came and she wanted to display the child. The Ngoni commended this practice by saying that their women kept clean because they did not carry babies about all day on their backs. They admitted at the same time that many infants grew greatly attached to their nurse girls, to the extent of being happier with them than with their mother. The nurse girls did not take little babies far afield. They stayed around within the fences of the household or near at hand, helping with domestic chores, chatting to other nurse girls, helping to prepare meals, and eating with the baby's mother and anyone else who formed part of the household eating unit. At night, after she had given the baby to its mother, she went off to sleep in the hut of the older woman who was in charge of her and other nurse girls.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

854 533 When the baby cried, and it was not time to take him to his mother for suckling, the nurse girl jogged him up and down on her back, and walked to and fro with him endlessly, crooning little lullabies to soothe the baby. Some of these lullabies were traditional, handed down from the older women, others were improvised by a nurse girl or copied by her from another.

539 Two traditional lullabies, well know in the Northern Ngoni kingdom, were as follows:

Hush my child;
Never mind, never mind,
Hush my child;
Never mind, never mind,
There is a busybody gossiping
There is a busybody gossiping
Ho! We reap the maize

Kholwane, Kholwane, son of Makhwaphuna,
What are you carrying?
I am carrying the food of the baby
For someone may go about defiling it
In the dark paths.

The following is an example of an impromptu lullaby which I heard from a nurse girl in the Northern kingdom:

Bu, bu, bu, bu,
The baby cries for its nurse and not for its mother.
Bu, bu, bu, bu,
She is coming to make gruel for the baby.
There she comes,
Bu, bu, bu, bu;
The baby sleeps.

853 The reference to the baby's food in two of the lullabies belongs to the second special feature of Ngoni infant care, the provision of baby food to supplement the mother's milk, and the arrangements for artificial feeding if the mother had

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

'A NEW STRANGER HAS COME'

Father's family to child

Ngoni children were indeed the children of their fathers from the time of their birth onwards. They were born into a 'house', of which their father was a member. If their father divorced his wife or she ran away, the children remained in the custody of his family. We have seen how the paternal grandmother took charge of all the preparations for birth, and of the actual birth itself. It was her proud duty to present the child to the public after the 'coming out of the hut' ceremony, when she took it to the kraal gate where the assembled elders were sitting. The other senior women of Ngoni families held her responsible for advising on the spacing between the birth of this new baby and the next, so that the interests of this child should be safeguarded. If it was suspected that the young wife was pregnant again before the grandmother had planned to wean the child, the other senior women said to her: 'Look now. You are foolish. The child has been endangered. You are like an enemy to him.' That touched her on a very vital point, and she in turn accused the young parents of harming the present child. Having rebuked them, generally in public, she followed it up with a box on the ear for her son and his wife. When this next child was born it was called 'the destroyer', because by following on too quickly, it had injured the propects of the first child.

Baby to nurse girl and women helpers

The baby, as we have seen, spent a great deal of its time in the company of its nurse girl, and after weaning she was its constant companion. She and the older woman helpers who supervised her formed a counterbalancing influence to the paternal grandmother, though outwardly they obeyed her instructions about the care of the child. The nurse girl especially was inclined to be indulgent; she was young and playful; the baby was her only responsibility. She was

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

anxious to protect her charge in every way, and with the connivance of the women helpers she made little charms of bits of roots to hang around the baby's neck to make him grow quickly and to ward off sorcery and witchcraft. She threaded pumpkin seeds and tied them around his neck to make his teeth come quickly if they were late in appearing. These charms were generally those used by the local peoples, and Ngoni fathers were contemptuous about their use and efficacy. 'These women are spoiling our children,' they said, and then reassured themselves by remembering that a boy would be free from such women's spoiling once he went into the boys' dormitory.

Variants on the Ngoni pattern

This traditional pattern of authority and behaviour in respect of birth, infant care and weaning was essentially that of the true Ngoni, that relatively small aristocratic group who never forgot their superior social status and its foundation in their ancestry. This first stage in the socialization of a child, from birth to weaning, brought out clearly two fundamental features of Ngoni social organization. One was the role played by the senior women who had themselves in their childhood been brought up on strict Ngoni lines. The father of the new baby accepted the role played by his own mother in controlling, and if necessary coercing, his young wife. Though, as we shall see later, every Ngoni boy and young man had a period of virtually complete escape from feminine control, once a man married and his young wife was established within the social group of his mother's house, he acknowledged his mother's authority over her, and particularly over the birth and care of his child. The mother-son relationship of the young father to his own mother dominated the relationship of the young mother to her child. Young Ngoni fathers never questioned their allegiance to their own mothers, cherishing them as they grew older and supporting them in their exercise of authority. Much as he loved his

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

142
291
854

14. Mother and babies

142
302
291
342
854

[facing page 96]

15. Nursemaids with their charges

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

turn to a younger brother for help in arranging a marriage, but although it is said that a man cannot marry the widow of a younger brother, this is sometimes done. The position of children born in a union of this kind is anomalous and there is likely to be dissension in the family if the elder brother has no children by his own wives.

10. Rights in wives and children

The new-born child sleeps in its mother's hut, is in danger from its father's adultery, and is held by its parents at their ritual resumption of sexual intercourse. It is carried to the garden on its mother's back and at mealtimes sucks porridge from her finger. Perhaps its father may play a little with it, but this is not very likely. After weaning, which takes place about the age of two, it may be sent to a grandparent or some other relative, or may perhaps remain in the parental hut for a few more years. But already it has been handled and probably suckled by many women, has learnt to play with the other young children in the village, and has gone off with them into the bush or to the stream. It has learnt also the correct kinship terms for most people in the village and has seen its village teams dance against those of other villages. It has gone visiting in other villages with its parents and has begun to explore its web of kinship, of which it is the centre.

The growing child therefore does not see its parents as sharply distinguished from all other adults in the vicinity, but merely as the two people to whom its ties are closest and on whom it is most dependent. If a child whose parents are dead or are living in Southern Rhodesia is brought up by a relative, it may not learn their names until it is adult, if then. Parents are important to their children only when they live near them or with them. It is when children grow up in the village of their parents that they rely on them for school fees, clothes and medicines. Later a boy may ask his father for financial help or may use him as a banker, handing over his wages to him.

This is true not only of a man's own children of whom he is both genitor and pater, but also of his wife's adulterine and pre-marital children, if he chooses to accept them into his household. It is clear that if a man has paid bridewealth, he has custody of all the children borne by his wife, in adultery as well as in wedlock. If he has not paid bridewealth, then adulterine children like legitimate children belong in theory to his wife's relatives. In practice a man can either accept or spurn them. If he has been away a long time and returns to find his wife with illegitimate children, he may decide to accept the children as his own. They then take his descent name and not that of their genitor. The biological parentage of such children is not mentioned openly, but is remembered in malicious gossip.

Case history 11

Laban went away to work in Southern Rhodesia. His wife Sara went

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

varying success in their other aims. The number of people with dozens of wives has decreased to zero, but this has been due to the operation of other factors as well as pressure from the missions. Whether the incidence of polygyny as a whole, that is the ratio of monogamist to polygynist men, has decreased is difficult to assess, since genealogical information is incomplete on barren wives and the wives of men whose descendants are now scattered. The fact that only six per cent of widows are inherited is due to the general change in the nature of marriage, the decline in the incidence of bridewealth, and the changed significance of residence, as well as to Christian endeavour. In these matters the general flow of events has been on the side of the missions. The same cannot be said for premarital copulation and for the ritual of 'taking up the child'. Censure from the mission is an additional hazard to be avoided in premarital intercourse, but it has not prevented it. In their opposition to the belief in *mdulo* and the ritual intercourse which follows as a consequence of the belief, the missions are aided by the teaching of hygiene and Western science in the schools, but there is no support from indigenous values. In this matter it is difficult to establish any trend, but the way in which attitudes are changing towards traditional mystical sanctions seems to be that the operation of the sanction is still believed in, but that the techniques for counteracting the sanction have been added to, so that the powerful medicines of Western civilization, particularly the sulphonamides, can be used to counteract the machinations of sorcerers. It does not seem likely that the belief in *mdulo* will disappear easily.

Thus in the system of values sustaining marriage, we find that there is some inconsistency. The teaching of the missions, the values associated with the old Ngoni way of life, and those deriving from the matrilineal tribes of the region conflict with one another on some points and support each other at others. The situations of the present day provide for considerable freedom of choice within these conflicting traditions, so that in one situation a man may adhere to the mission teaching in condemning the bigamy of another man in his village, and in another situation take part in the marriage negotiations for an additional wife for his chief, in accordance with the old Ngoni system of values. A man condones the secret lovers of his unmarried daughter, but when she becomes pregnant brings them to court with the approval of the mission.

6. *The transfer of rights*

The rights transferred from one group to the other by marriage payments in the old system were clearly defined. By the payment of 'snuff-box' the man's patrilineal kin group acquired rights *in uxorem* in the woman, and by the bridewealth they acquired rights *in genetricem*.[4] If the woman committed adultery after 'snuff-box'

[4] I have taken these terms from the interesting paper by Mrs. Bohannan on 'Dahomean marriage: a revaluation', *Africa*, xix (1949), p. 278 to indicate rights in a woman as wife and as mother respectively.

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

844 If a female child, "You have seen a basket." Then the man comes and sits down on the verandah and makes fire. The old fire in the hut is thrown away. The old woman takes up the new fire and kindles with it a new fire in the hut. The husband goes away to another hut. He does not now cohabit with [846] any of his other wives until his wife, who was confined, is seen again in public.

II. When they know the umbilical cord is going to break, when they set the infant on the knees (legs), they lay it on its side so that when the cord breaks it will fall on one side; for if it breaks and falls on the pubes the child will be impotent, or barren. The umbilical cord they bury on the verandah. That day is the one on which they shave the mother and child. They begin with the infant and they shave the mother. On shaving the infant's head they leave a little hair on the fontanel, and [614] should the infant be of the clan *Maseko*, they also leave a little patch on the back of the head, and 553 then his godmother gives the child a name, saying, "My grandchild's name is so and so." This name it will have until such time as it begins to laugh and notice people, then the father, should he wish, will give the child another name. When it grows up still farther it will give itself a name, saying, "Now I am so and so." When the child becomes a man he will once again discard his old name and take another. And if a person calls him by the old name, he says, "He has named me by that thing the wild bush-pigs unearth while digging with their tusks" [meaning something very old]. When they have finished the shaving, the child's grandmother ●854 powders some medicine called *pfundabwe*, this she 218 mixes with castor oil and red clay, and then rubs on 751 the fontanel. This medicine they continually renew. When the infant gets strong and big they stop. The

6:Rattray E,G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

reason they put on this medicine is that they fear the sun lest it strike through the skull. They also take a purgative medicine called *chizuzu*, and pour a decoction in a gourd used for cooking the infant's gruel. The gruel is left off once the child gets strong.

III. Now they prepare to steam the infant. They get the roots of the *Nyalinse* tree and the leaves of the *Chipunganyunyu*, and put them in a pot of water, and get four large white pebbles, and put them in the fire, and when they are red hot, lift them out between two pieces of stick, and drop them into the pot, and the steam envelops the infant. They do this because they fear a disease called *Tsempo* and *Mauka*. This done, the floor of the hut is replastered [with dung], and they set fire to everything that was left in the hut—baskets, potsherds, and spoons. The fire in the hollow in the centre of the floor, they rake up on the floor level, and remove the ashes only, but when they come to fasten the mkuzi belt round the infant's waist, the fire is completely extinguished, and rekindled from that of some other hut. Then the husband comes and stands upright near the doorway, and little cuts are made on his leg. They begin with his big toe, and cut four little slashes, and four on his shin, and four on his knee, both sides, and do the same on the other leg, and on his chest are cut two little gashes, and on his back two. Into these cuts is rubbed some medicine for a disease called *Chinyalo*. When they do this they fear, should the man step over the spot on the verandah where the umbilical cord and afterbirth are buried, he might take this disease of the legs (Chinyalo). If the man have another wife it is she who twists the belt made from the bark of the *Mpoza* tree and places it underneath the mat where she and her husband sleep. Next morning

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

she rises early to go and fasten the belt on the infant. Should the man not have a second wife, the one to put the belt on the child is his (the man's) sister. The man does not immediately see the face of his child; some day these same old women make him take it in his arms [hands]. The father then makes them a present of beads.

IV. When they notice the infant is beginning to grow his bottom teeth and to smile at people, the elders tell the father that, "Now you must bring the child into the village." The child's grandmother ties up beforehand some *lizango*. She begins with a little strip of calico, and rolls it round and round the medicine charm and along with a piece of string; then takes a little piece of skin and sews it over this, and takes some beads and sews them on the skin. The mother cooks some relish beforehand. That evening the husband and wife sleep together (this is "to bring the child into the village.") She cuts off the old belt the child is wearing, and puts on the new one with the *lizango* medicine in it, some more of the medicine, similarly tied up, is placed under the infant's head. In the morning she takes the relish to present to the two old women, and then takes the *lizango* she had placed under the child's head and ties it round his neck, and then takes a belt of beads, interspersed with little wooden charms, and adorns the child. When in time the *lizango* belt breaks, they do not look for it or replace it. In the event of an infant dying before he has been "brought into the village," they bury it in some open glade, near the edge of some stream, its funeral is attended by women only. Should a man tramp over the spot where the child is buried, he "has taken" the disease known as *nyesi*. Such a grave is known as *nsenye*.

/9 cont'd/

224 the hunt walks in the middle of the line, with a responsible person posted on each flank. A started animal, if not shot by the guns, usually turns to run parallel to the line of hunters, who hurl spears and knobkerries at it, and send their dogs after it. The chances of escape for a hunted animal are fairly high. Animals are also trapped, usually with a piece of meat tied to the muzzle of a gun. Hunting with nets is sometimes undertaken in the wet season. Rats are caught in small conical traps baited with beans. The rat chews through a piece of string and releases a green stick, thereby strangling itself.

[114] Shields, once the pride of the Ngoni armies, are not carried on hunts and are infrequently seen.

VI

29 [117] It is only the old men who still wear skin garments, and then only as additions to European style clothing. Men are dressed in khaki shorts and shirts, long trousers, cast-off European clothing, or clothes brought back from the army. Often two shirts are worn on top of one another. Women wear a blouse, a skirt tied on a tape, a cloth wrapped round on top of the skirt, and a small cloth tied [854] round their waist. If carrying a baby, the cloth supporting the child is slung over the left and under the right shoulder, and another cloth may be wrapped round the woman and child under her armpits. Dresses are also worn, and sometimes a singlet under the blouse. Shoes are less common for women than for men. Men /10/ wear a [117] variety of European style hats, but women wear only embroidered cloths or berets, or in the case of poorer women, plain bands of cloth.

Children go naked, or may be draped in whatever garment, of whatever size, happens to be available. If the money is there to pay for them, boys are dressed in shorts and shirts, and girls in little dresses.

304 [118] In the old days, every adult had slit ears, but this custom has died out. Women nowadays pierce their ears if they wish, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a small slit made as a